

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**

HSS(MD)70/2020



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

For Action:

Trust Chief Executives (*for onward distribution to all managers and clinicians responsible for the care of children and young people (less than 18 years of age)*);

Chief Executive of Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to the Child Health Partnership and relevant staff*)

GP Medical Advisers, Health and Social Care Board

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (*for onward distribution to practice staff*)

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Your Ref:

Our Ref: HSS(MD)70/2020

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Dear Colleagues

**COVID-19 - 'SHIELDING' GUIDANCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:
ROYAL COLLEGE OF PAEDIATRICS AND CHILD HEALTH (RCPCH)**

ACTION REQUIRED

Trust Chief Executives must ensure that:

- arrangements are put in place to fully implement the RCPCH guidance including providing support for consultants to review and maintain lists of children and young people (less than 18 years of age) under their care who are extremely vulnerable to severe COVID-19;
- secondary and tertiary care consultants should continue to review and maintain lists of children and young people (less than 18 years of age) under their care who are extremely vulnerable to severe COVID-19 and provide individual advice to parents, children, young people and carers, in line with RCPCH guidance;
- the advice provided is available in each child/young person's electronic care record;
- this information is drawn to the attention of all staff involved in the care of children and young people (less than 18 years of age), including managers and clinical staff in specialities caring for children and young people, school health teams, health visitors and community children nurses.

The HSCB must ensure this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and practice managers for onward distribution to all staff involved in the care of children and young people.

General Practitioners should refer to the RCPCH guidance in relation to children and young people (less than 18 years of age) and seek advice from secondary/tertiary care colleagues where necessary.

INTRODUCTION

I am writing to advise that I, along with the other three UK Chief Medical Officers, have approved the RCPCH guidance on COVID-19 - 'Shielding' for Children and Young people for implementation. The full guidance is available at:

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people>

BACKGROUND

In March and April of this year children and adults across Northern Ireland who fell into the "clinically extremely vulnerable" category were identified and advised to shield in order to protect themselves from the SARS CoV-2 Virus. This was a stringent but necessary advisory measure in order to minimise the risk of those considered to be most vulnerable to severe illness and poor outcome should they contract the virus. Shielding was paused for all adults and children in Northern Ireland from the 1st of August 2020.

The criteria used to identify adults and children who should shield were developed early in the course of the pandemic based on the information about the disease that was available at that time. In June of this year the RCPCH presented the four UK CMOs with a comprehensive review of the impact COVID-19 on children and young people with underlying health conditions. Their review concluded that the risk to children and young people of becoming seriously ill should they contract COVID-19, even those with serious underlying conditions, was very low. Based on this analysis only a small group of children and young people who receive specialist care in hospitals, such as those receiving cancer care or with a recent organ transplant, are likely to be considered clinically extremely vulnerable to coronavirus. The majority of children and young people who shielded in the first instance will not need to shield in future, should the shielding advice be reinstated.

SECONDARY CARE CLINICIANS' REVIEW OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PREVIOUSLY ADVISED TO SHIELD

The majority of children and young people in Northern Ireland who met the original shielding criteria are under the care of secondary and tertiary care services. Over the summer, local paediatricians in Northern Ireland, through the Child Health Partnership, undertook to review children and young people who had been advised to shield and provide individual advice to parents, children, young people and carers.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

A very small number of children and young people have been advised not to return to school by their hospital specialist. However, the vast majority of children and young people who were previously shielding have been able to return to school.

I appreciate this has been a time of uncertainty and in some cases anxiety for pupils, staff and parents. It is important to reinforce the importance of returning to school for children and young people. Missing out on school can impact on children's and young people's development, exacerbate physical and mental health issues and ultimately reduce life chances. For the vast majority of children and young people the benefits of attending school outweigh any risks to them posed by COVID-19. The consensus statement from the UK Chief Medical officers on schools and childcare reopening is available at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-schools-and-childcare-reopening>

I would like to thank the Child Health Partnership and colleagues in Trusts, the Board, the Public Health Agency and primary care who have been working together to implement the RCPCH guidance and to provide advice and support to parents, children, young people and carers.

Yours sincerely



DR MICHAEL McBRIDE
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER

CIRCULATION LIST

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)
Assistant Director Public Health (Health Protection), Public Health Agency
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines Management, Health and Social Care Board (*for onward distribution to Community Pharmacies*)
Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts
Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB
Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health and Social Care Board (*for cascade to GP Out of Hours services*)
Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Consultants, Occupational Health Physicians and School Medical Leads*)
Nursing Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward distribution to all Community Nurses, and Midwives*)
Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts
RQIA (*for onward transmission to all independent providers including independent hospitals*)
Medicines Management Pharmacists, HSC Board (*for cascade to prescribing advisers*)
Regional Medicines Information Service, Belfast HSC Trust
Regional Pharmaceutical Procurement Service, Northern HSC Trust
Professor Donna Fitzsimons, Head of School of Nursing and Midwifery QUB
Professor Sonja McIlpatrick, Head of School of Nursing, University of Ulster
Caroline Lee, CEC
Donna Gallagher, Open University
Professor Paul McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, UU
Professor Colin McCoy, Head of School, School of Pharmacy, QUB
Professor Colin Adair, Director of the NI Centre for Pharmacy Learning and Development, QUB
Joe Brogan, Assistant Director of Integrated Care, HSCB
Michael Donaldson, HSCB (*for distribution to all General Dental Practitioners*)
Raymond Curran, Head of Ophthalmic Services, HSCB (*for distribution to Community Optometrists*)
Trade Union Side
John Smith, Department of Education

This letter is available on the Department of Health website at

<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>